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This paper discusses a problem in semantic analysis of modern standard Thai. The synchronically polysememic morpheme /cay/ has meanings approximately equivalent to English "heart, mind, spirit" and "breath." A purely descriptive approach to this form would require two separate dictionary entries for /cay/. An examination of the history of /cay/, however, sheds interesting light on the modern sememes. The morpheme is described first using internal reconstruction and then the comparative method. The disparate results of these two diachronic approaches are weighed, a choice proposed, and a Proto-Tai source suggested for the modern reflexes. (Author/DO)

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A Semantic Analysis of Modern Thai /cay/

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I would like to start with a comment directed at those who have studied the abstract of this paper contained in the meeting handbook regarding the relationship between the paper and the abstract. Since composition of the abstract I have been able to work further with the problem I have set myself. I have, as a result, found the synchronic details not as interesting as the history of Thai /cay/. Therefore, I devote myself in what follows almost completely to a diachronic treatment. As a further prefatory note, as a consequence of the need to discuss comparative evidence bearing on modern Thai /cay/, and because of the lack of a /t-/ vs. /t'-/ (voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated alveolar stop) contrast in English, I will not follow my natural inclination--but will refer to Thai as Siamese, in keeping with the accepted convention among students of Thai, T-H-A-I. In this manner the English pronunciation [t'ai] may be reserved for Tai, T-A-I, the family to which Siamese belongs.

This paper begins as an exercise in the application of the method of internal reconstruction to a problem of semantic structure in modern standard Siamese--defined as a the speech of cultivated Thais of the Bangkok-Central Plain area of Thailand. The aim of the paper is to present a hypothesis as to the solution of this problem initially in terms of internal reconstruction. Insights provided by the use of the comparative method, however, suggest that a revision of the internal reconstruction solution would not be inappropriate.

The data which are analyzed in this paper are the Siamese forms on the hand-out under the heading "Thai data" (see below for details). The English

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glosses are intended merely to be suggestive of the meanings involved and do not constitute a formal, exhaustive analysis of the Siamese data.

(1) /caydam/ V to be cruel, selfish, unscrupulous (/dam/ to be dark, black).

(2) /caydii/ V to be good-natured, kind-hearted (/dii/ to be good).

(3) /diicay/ V to be happy

(4) /cayyen/ V to be steady, calm, cool-headed (/yen/ to be cool, cold)

(5) /cayl ɔɔ y/ V to be absent-minded, have one's mind wander (/l ɔɔ y/ to float, drift).

(6) /cayr ɔ́ɔ n/ V to be impetuous, hasty; to be impatient (/r ɔ́ɔ n/ to be hot; to be urgent).

(7) /r ɔ́ ɔ ncay/ V to worry about something.

(8) /cayʔ ɔ̀ɔ n/ V to be easily influenced, softhearted; to be squeamish (ʔ ɔ̀ɔ n/ to be soft, tender).

(9) /khɨaŋcay/ V to be provoked (/khɨaŋ/ to be annoyed; to be angry with).

(10) /khùncay/ V to be depressed, gloomy; to resent (/khùn/ to be cloudy, muddy, turbid).

(11) /khâwcay/ V to understand (/khâw/ to enter).

(12) /klɔ̀ mcay/ V to soothe, calm (/klɔ̀ m/ to lull [to sleep]).

(13) /taamcay/ V to humor, yield to the wishes of, to please (/taam/ to follow).

(14) /tâŋcay/ V to intend (/tâŋ/ to set, establish).

(15) /ʔàdcay V to feel repressed; to hold one's breath (/ʔàd/ to press, condense, compress).

(16) /klâncay/ V to hold one's breath (/klân/ to refrain from; to inhibit).

(17) /thɔ̌ɔ ncay/ V to sigh (/thɔ̌ɔ n/ to pull, draw; to extract).

(18) /hǎaycay/ V to breathe (/hǎay/ to be missing, disappear).

(19) /khàadcay/ V to die (/khàad/ to finish; to be broken).

(20) /hɔ̀ ɔ bcay/ V to be out of breath (/hɔ̀ɔ b/ to pant; to gasp).

(21) /sîncay/ V to die (/sîn/ to terminate).

The polysememic morpheme /cay/ is found in all of the collocations and, in the sense "heart, mind, spirit", can clearly be seen in items (1) through (14). For example, (2) is a concatenation of /cay/ and /dii/, the verbal adjective "to be good" with basically the same semantic result as English "good-hearted". Further, forms such as (10) "to be depressed" can be understood as metonymy (or in Stephen Ullmann's usage, association between senses due to continguity) from something of the sort, "to be cloudy/muddy at heart/spirit/mind" --the verb /khùn/ by itself usually meaning "to be cloudy or muddy".

In Siamese monosyllabic words are extremely common and the semantic content of numerous compounds and collocations may be analyzed in terms of a combination of the semantic content of their parts, e.g., /tûu/ "cabinet" and /năŋsɯ̌ɯ/ "book" combine to /tûunăŋsɯ̌ɯ/ "bookcase". However, the semantic content of the second sense of (15) "to hold one's breath" and of the senses of (16) through (21) require further analysis since, for example, (18) "to breathe" does not mean *"disappearing heart/mind/spirit" (from /hǎay/ "to disappear" + /cay/). Note also that traditional Siamese culture does not conceive of death, cf. (19)-(21), in terms of a cessation of the functioning of the heart, or, indeed, of the brain. The traditional (or folk) view is that death is marked by the termination of breathing, a belief shared by many other cultures. William Gedney has pointed out to me the stereotyped phrase /than hěn cay/ "to arrive in time to see someone before they die" to which he ascribes the meaning "to see the breath". The semantic content common to (16) through (21) is isolatable as "breath" by proportional analysis. If, for example, /klâncay/ means "to hold one's breath" and /klân/ is "to inhibit", then "breath" may be inferred for /cay/, and so forth through those collocations. The form /cay/ is never used as a noun with the sense of "breath"; the usual term for "breath is /lomhǎaycay/, literally "wind" + (18).

Although I usually use a modified componential analysis in my work on Siamese semantics I will omit the discussion of the semantic components of the various senses of /cay/ here. This is done for two reasons: (1) because it is not crucial to the particular aspect of semantic structure under discussion and (2) in order to save time.

The link between /cay/ "heart/mind/spirit" and /cay/ "breath" may be said to lie in such a collocation as (15). As Ullmann has pointed out, a transferral of sense is "the main source of polysemy". Precisely such a transfer for /cay/ is found in (15), which has two distinct senses; "to feel repressed or inhibited" (a psychological state) and, somewhat less commonly, "to hold one's breath" (a physiological state). It could therefore be argued that /cay/, with the meaning "heart/mind/spirit" occurs in a large number of collocations in modern Siamese, and has by a route through such an expression as (15) developed a secondary sense "breath". Confirmation of the secondary nature ascribed this sense by native speakers may be found in the fact that the official Royal Council of Thailand Dictionary contains thirty-seven entries under /cay/ none of which has the "breath" sense. Further, of some seventy-odd collocations involving /cay/ used by my principal informant only seven involved the "breath" sense.

Note that (18) through (21) are grammatically (i.e., syntactically) similar to such collocations as (12) and (13) in consisting of verb + /cay/. Two sets may be differentiated, however, on the basis of their expandability to /____?òg____cay/ (see item (22) in the appendix)--an expansion which effects no change in semantic reference but causes an intensification of the meaning. Compare English word stress or the intensifier "really": "They're depressed" vs. "They're really depressed"; /khǎw khùncay/ vs. /khǎw khun?ògkhùncay/. Expansions of this sort are widely used in Siamese and evidence a speaker's idiosyncratic attitude. Only the /klɔ̀mcay/ type--which includes (3) through

(14) excluding (4)-(6) and (8) which are /cay/ + verb--may undergo this expansion. Collocations (18)-(21) from the non-expandable set. The collocations (15), (16), and (17) however, may be assigned to either set depending on whether they mean physiological holding the breath and sighing (not expandable) or psychological acts (expandable)--see (23) and (24) in the appendix.

The preceding provides a seemingly satisfactory account of Siamese /cay/ arrived at by internal semantic reconstruction. However, the relative importance attached to the sense "heart/mind/spirit" as opposed to the idiomatic sense "breath" may be challenged. The comparative method provides crucial information which leads me to a reformulation of the description just proposed. Fang-kuei Li has cited languages in southwestern China which are related to Siamese (i.e., belong to the Tai family), and in which the cognate word with /cay/ only means "breath". In a representative Tai language of this northern Tai branch--Wu-ming, "breath" is /šay/, see item (25) in the appendix. The phonological correspondences are regular.

Note that internal reconstruction and external reconstruction provide two contrasting points of view for the analysis of the semantic structure of Siamese /cay/. Internal reconstruction is influenced by the great quantity of collocations in Siamese involving "heart/mind/spirit" and the contrasting small number of "breath" collocations. The analysis assigned to Siamese /cay/ by the method of internal reconstruction is consequently one which treats the "breath" sense as peripheral and restricted to a small number of collocations which are described as semantically idiomatic. The external Wu-ming evidence, however, adds strong support for the rather rare Siamese sense "breath" as being historically more prominent or more central than the now common "heart/mind/spirit" senses.

The pattern found in a representative Central Tai language is noteworthy and suggests that the Central branch displays a structure from which Northern and Southwestern may be derived (a role which appears supportable for the Central branch in phonological and lexical studies as well). Diguet's work on the Tho of Vietnam includes four items in which the cognate /tchoeu/ occurs--appendix items (26)-(28). The last morpheme, (28), includes in its semantic scope (or field) both heart and lungs, i.e. breath, and is ideally suited to provide a source to which Northern "breath" may be related and Southwestern "heart".

In closing, I would suggest that the comparative evidence of other Tai languages: namely the existence of forms cognate to Siamese /cay/ with the sense "breath" and "interior of the chest" requires a different emphasis for the Siamese treatment from that posited earlier using internal Siamese evidence alone. The external evidence of Wu-ming and Tho permit triangulations from the semantical knowns of Siamese, Tho, and Wu-ming to the Proto-Tai unknown. It may be hypothesized that Proto-Tai had a form from which Siamese /cay/, Tho /tchoeu/, and Wu-ming /šay/ have developed, and that this word had the meanings *"breath" and *"interior of the chest". There has been loss in Wu-ming of the "interior of the chest" sense while Tho has retained both earlier senses and, with Siamese, has developed "heart" by specialization. Siamese, like Wu-ming, has also lost the sense "interior of the chest" and has developed (perhaps extensionally) "spirit, mind", retaining only a limited number of collocations in which the sense "breath" remains as a relic. I would conclude therefore, that Siamese /cay/ may be described most thoroughly as a polysememic morpheme with the senses "heart", "spirit", "mind", "breath" of which the least common modern sense is historically the oldest of the four senses.

Reference is made to the following works:

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